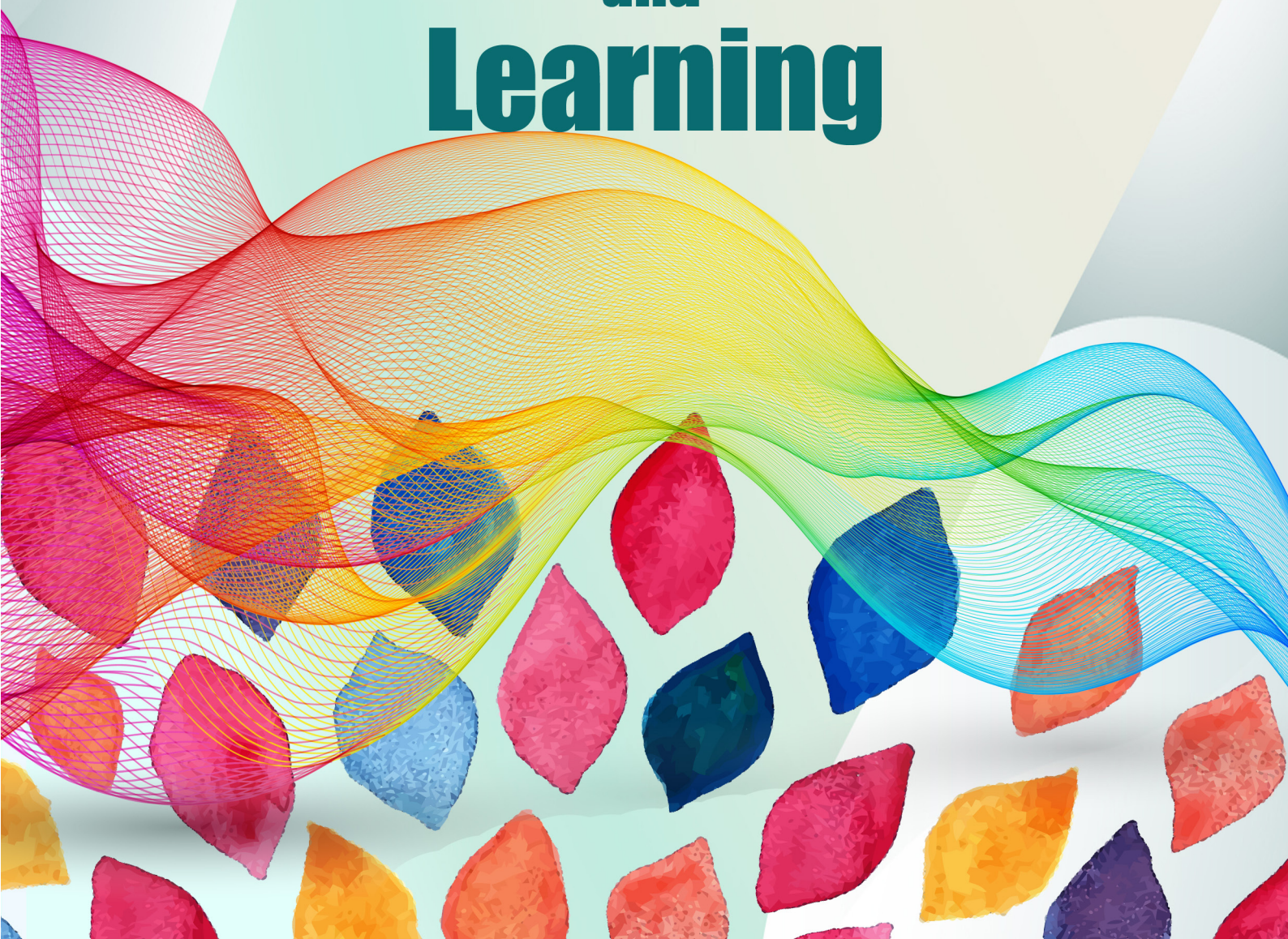


REFLECTIONS

on

Teaching and Learning



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ISSN 1823-2396



9 771823 239007

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Dean's Message



Greetings from CALM!

Iwish to welcome all readers to Volume 29 of the INSIGHT bulletin. The theme of this issue is “Reflections on Teaching and Learning”. These compilations of reflections are contributed by the participants of our Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning Programme who did their teaching practices in recent years. In this issue, we would like to share some contemporary issues faced by lecturers and worth noting teaching and learning practices on campus.

Studies have shown how deliberate reflection on teaching practices contributes to excellence in teaching and improves educational outcomes. Reflective teaching practices encourage lecturers to regularly evaluate their approaches to teaching and learning, and understand more about the effects of their employed pedagogies on students’ learning. With such practices, lecturers become more aware on the importance of high quality interactions, including conversations, to maximise students’ learning experiences.

We are delighted to present 24 articles related to this theme. The first article is contributed by Associate Professor Dr Ting Su Hie, who also serves as the module coordinator and lecturer for the Teaching Practice module of the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning programme. Her article explains the different perspectives of reflections in teaching and learning as well as the contributing aspects to effective reflections. Sixteen articles are authored by lecturers from various faculties at UNIMAS and another seven articles are written by lecturers from the Centre for Pre-University Studies.

I would like to thank all contributors of this issue. I hope that this INSIGHT issue will inspire all academics to integrate reflection into their teaching practices as we continue to strive to ensure our students have meaningful and successful learning experiences.

The theme for the upcoming INSIGHT issue (Vol. 30) is “Service Learning: Bridging the Gap between the Classroom and the Community”. Your articles may take the form of a summary of research output, an anecdotal account of personal experience in planning and/or implementing service learning or a critical analysis of certain topics or issues related to the theme.

Thank you and happy reading!

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UNIMAS

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS



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Participants of the staff development programme, Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning, in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak engage in many reflections during the course of completing the eight modules. It is lauded as an effective technique to improve teaching performance. Does it?

Reflections are called by different names: self-assessments/self-ratings, self-reports/teaching portfolio, and self-evaluation. These terms reflect different perspectives of self-evaluation (Table 1). In staff training programmes, the value of reflections

seems to be overemphasised, judging by the number of reflections participants engage in during the training. However, once the participants are back into the real world, reflections are not valued as much student and peer ratings. For instance, instructor effectiveness is judged based on student ratings rather than self-ratings. The main assumption is that the participants would overrate themselves but research has shown that some participants are harder on themselves than their students and peers.

What is perhaps more disconcerting is that the “reflection = improvement in teaching performance”

Table 1: Different perspectives of self-evaluation

Self-assessments/self-ratings	Self-reports/teaching portfolio	Self-evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors rate themselves, usually on some predetermined dimensions. • One quarter to one third of teachers overrate themselves, particularly in teacher-student interaction and openness. • 15% underrate themselves. • Student ratings and teachers' self-assessments have been found to match. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors provide a description of responsibilities and teaching performance with evidence of student learning. • An objective method to provide information on teaching performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors assess themselves critically because they want to improve their teaching performance. • Instructors focus on methods that work well and aspects of the teaching process that need to be reviewed. • Self-evaluations are more likely to result in teaching effectiveness than student ratings.

(Source: Taylor, 1994)

equation may not be true. This is because if the participants are not intrinsically motivated to evaluate themselves, and they do reflections to meet some external requirements, it is just an exercise in providing an emotional response to their own teaching and it ends there. For the use of the authorities, perhaps evidence of student learning such as course projects would provide an objective method to provide information on teaching performance. The practice of assessing course files to nominate “lecturer of the year” is based on this.

The characteristic that gives reflection its strength is also its weakness – the freedom of expression on incidents that affect the instructor. For example, the unexpected failure of technology, the students’ unresponsiveness, and the learning (or no learning) that takes place. The reflective responses qualify as reflections but seem like “fire-fighting”.

Some structure may make reflections a more effective technique to improve teaching performance. Johnstone (1990, cited in Taylor, 1994) suggests having a checklist for participants to consider:

1. **Are the aims of the course explicit?**
2. **Is the content accurate and up-to-date?**
3. **Are students being given an opportunity to develop relevant skills?**
4. **Are the teaching methods appropriate, supporting the aims and objectives of the course?**
5. **Are students given sufficient feedback about their performance?**
6. **Do the students believe that the teacher is accessible for assistance out of class?**
7. **Is the course too demanding or not demanding enough?**

These questions guide participants to assess themselves critically, rather than report the series of actions that took place during the one to three hours of lectures, tutorials or laboratory sessions. The actions can constitute reports of observations made during the teaching but it is better if the reflections are accompanied by expectations and assessments of overall effectiveness. Based on their assessment, instructors may decide to modify, cancel or maintain use of a particular technique or set of materials.

Actually for reflections to have its desired effect in the improvement of teaching, there must be feedback for each instructor – something that trainers of staff development programmes may not be ready to commit to. If there are 20 participants writing weekly reflections, a lot of meaningful feedback needs to be given, and it cannot be achieved through a quick reading of the reflections and a brief comment.

The best feedback, according to Bain, Mills, Ballantyne, and Packer (2002), is one that challenges the participant through questions, and encourages them to strive to high levels or explore alternatives. In fact, Bain et al. (2002) believe that participants should be asked to assess their own ability to reflect and given feedback on that. In fact, other researchers like Branch and Paranjape (2002) have suggested using this prompt as a starter, “Before I share my views, how did you view your performance?” Bain et al. (2002) also found that feedback on teaching issues do not work as well as direct feedback on the reflective writing process. With specific feedback of this nature, participants develop in their ability to write reflectively.

Just as ability to reflect needs to be learnt, ability to give feedback also needs to be learnt! This article ends with two examples of feedback with higher level of questioning and challenge on the reflective writing process and teaching issues.



Table 2. Examples of feedback with higher level of questioning and challenge on the reflective writing process and teaching issues

	Focus on reflective writing process and high level of challenge	Focus on teaching issues and high level of challenge
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirm or dispute participant's self-rating, 2. Use the participants' own entry as a starting point, and 3. Model the desired processes of questioning and exploring alternatives encourage the participant to strive towards high levels. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide some practical advice or suggestion on an issue, and 2. Pose questions and challenge participants' assumptions.
Example	<p>You have rated your journal at level 4 and I agree that you have just reached this level by starting to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the approach you discuss. You could extend this level of writing by giving greater consideration to the implications of your observations, and how this might influence your teaching in future. For example, in your journal you state "I feel that some of the students are relying too heavily on me for guidance on how to do this assignment ...". You could explore this line of reasoning a little further.</p>	<p>While we agree that adding colour and bounce to lessons is a good idea, the literature draws a distinction between individual interest and situational interest. If students cannot move from individual interest to situational interest, their learning will be superficial. The challenge then for instructors is to help students become inherently interested in a subject themselves rather than relying on all the fun stuff we provide. A possibility to consider is to begin teaching from the students' prior knowledge. Would it make any difference to the students' attitude to learning the subject if their questions were incorporated into lesson? If it would, how would their attitudes change and how does it affect their learning of drama?</p>

(Source: Taylor, 1994)

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Dealing with *large* lecture classes



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There were supposed to be 154 students registered for the course but only 54 turned up on the first day. This was frustrating because many were going to miss the ice breaking activity and the introduction to Strategic Human Resource Development. However, the turnout for the second lecture was full. Seeing the full attendance made me realise the challenges that I would be facing for the entire semester especially to keep them engaged during the lecture.

In a large lecture setting, the lecture atmosphere is considered optimal if students are all well-behaved during the class and participate in the activities. It is not realistic to expect all the students to be disciplined all the time because there would always be some small groups of students who would ignore some of the instructions during the activities.

154 students makes classroom management a huge challenge. Taking into consideration the size of the classroom, facilities including the type of seating and room condition, I have to



admit that it was really difficult to get students to stay engaged with the learning process throughout the semester.

Before one of the lectures, I had decided to ask students to read up on a contemporary development. My decision to ask students to read up on Talent Corporation succeeded in encouraging pre-class engagement. This subsequently helped me to achieve one of the objectives of the lecture which was to identify the roles and functions of Talent Corporation.

I believe that the individual mind map activity and the presentation session had enabled the students to use their creativity in explaining and sharing their ideas as well as discussing with their peers on the roles and functions of Talent Corporation. This activity was able to engage at least 85% of the students. I considered the effectiveness below my expectations but I had to remind myself that 154 is a big number of students. At the end of the activity, I was able to summarise the lesson by referring to a big tree diagram which recapped the whole ideas of Talent Corporation.

Breaking away from conventional methods of teaching in the field



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The last topic in the Music Theory II course was transposition. This should be among the easiest topics because the student only needed to identify the transposed instruments in an orchestra. They had learnt woodwind family, saxophones, brass, strings and percussion family. The transposed instruments are usually in the woodwind and brass families.

They had been taught how to transpose the instruments in different keys and a quick Question-and-Answer session confirmed that they had the necessary knowledge. During the semester, I had shown a few video clips so that they knew how the instruments sounded and also, pictures of the transposed instruments so that they knew what the instruments looked like.

I believe that music is a universal language. Music unites everyone. Everyone listens to the same music. But I need to relate them to the real world. Music Theory II is an advanced class compared to Music Theory I. It is dry and theoretical.



In my own music education, I had been taught the conventional way – through piles of music writing assignments. The rote method was used for practice. I had moved away from that, and am slowly going towards the Gagne Briggs method. Using a mixture of video clips, sharing experiences, and being an entertainer and a pianist really helped the students to understand the figured bass usage earlier on in the semester.

I incorporated a one-minute feedback into my lectures. The student feedback showed me that they had enjoyed the prior knowledge discussion, group assignments and series of video clips. However, I still retained the use of the slides and whiteboard method. I also found that story telling and humour are important techniques to gain students' attention and maintain their interest in a dry theory class.

Getting students to participate in class



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First-year students are often shy and not confident when they are asked to give presentations (even short ones) during the class, and therefore they tend to be quiet and express less thoughts and opinions than they would have. This makes it difficult for instructors to evaluate whether the students have sufficient understanding of a concept or topic discussed in the class.

To deal with the problem of passive students in lectures, I decided to use virtual wall (i.e. Padlet) as a tool to allow friendly interaction between students and teacher. Students were requested to read a journal article and later post their comments and suggestions on this virtual wall before they come to the class. I compared the students' engagement in discussion using this virtual tool and in-class presentation.

During the in-class group discussion and presentation, a majority of the students were very reluctant to interact. Passive students were not participating in the Q&A sessions or even showed lack of interest in the whole process. I noticed that only a handful of students were active during the presentation and giving their opinions to others. Surprisingly, most students, including the passive individuals, were actually very active in expressing their thoughts in the virtual wall before they come to the class and even after the class. They attached images and relevant articles for further readings, and even shared some useful videos among their classmates on the Padlet Wall. I believe that virtual wall (such as Padlet) serves as an important alternative platform for particularly young and techno-savvy students to motivate them to participate actively in teaching-learning activities.

In addition to the virtual wall, I introduced another online tool (i.e. an online game called “Kahoot” quiz) at the end of a lecture. This application asked the students to focus their attention on the questions projected on the screen and to quickly choose the best answers in real-time using their electronic devices with web browser. Students were very excited when they saw their names appearing on the screen with ranking of their scores.

However, some students complained that they did not get equal chance to use this new learning application because of slow Internet connection while others did not even have a smartphone. In addition, I realized that I had set a short attempt timing (30s) for each question that some students could not have sufficient time to answer the question because their device took too long to load the multiple-choice answers onto the screen. To deal with the slow Internet connection, I allowed a longer attempt time (60s) for each question. Furthermore, students were allowed to pair with those who did not have a smartphone.

As expected, I received better feedback after the changes were made. Students enjoyed the quiz and everyone had the opportunity to participate. I will certainly use this application in my future lectures to get students to participate in their learning and to introduce fun into the lectures.

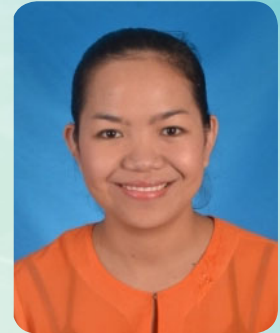
Being available to students **24/7**

Many lecturers nowadays have to make a decision whether or not to give their mobile phone number to their students. I always give my mobile number to my students in the first lecture.

For this semester when I was teaching Biology 1, I did the same thing. I realised that I had to add rules of using the phone to contact me. This is because some of them texted me even at 11.30 p.m. Sometimes they asked for examination answers on weekends, and I did not bring my notes home. Hence, I could not reply them on the spot.

I felt that they did not know about privacy and that lecturers need to have their leisure time too. However, I am a wife and a mother. I need to spend time with my family. Learning from these experiences, I set rules such as “no more text or chat after 8 p.m. on weekdays” and “no more text or chat on weekends”. I am glad the students can follow rules and I do not need to change my mobile phone number.

I also believe it is a good thing for them to learn to make appointments using phone – so that we can meet later and discuss solutions.



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Dealing with students' personal problems



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Last year, I have a mentee who could be considered as a competent student. During the beginning of the semester, he was excellent in his academic studies as well as co-curricular activities. He used to be his school representative in several inter-school competitions.

He was kind and helpful too. Soon he became very popular among the students. After a few months,

he faced his worst phase in life when his girlfriend decided to break up with him.

He began to show irregularities by skipping one of the co-curricular sessions. Later, I was informed that his academic performance was not as good as before and it never really improved further until the final examinations. When I first knew of his bad performance, I tried to get hold of him to follow up with his progress in study. He told me that his mind became blank during examination period even though he had begun his revision a week before the examination day. He claimed that he began to face this situation after he failed one of his mid semester tests.

I did not know what to do with him but to tell him not to be so nervous with examination and try to relax himself instead. Guess it was not too helpful since his academic result remained bad. The ability to face changes in life is crucial. There is a limit to what lecturers can do to teach their students to overcome setbacks in life.

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Setting GROUND RULES

Whenever a new semester kicks in, I would always begin my usual routine with the new set of students I have; which is by setting the ground rules for the class. It is common for me to see the attendance record in the first week could be as little as 16 students of the 40 capacity. That translates to the need for me to recap on the ground rules when the number has stabilised in the coming week. I have always believe that by setting ground rules would help my students to practically understand their responsibilities and roles to play. I believe that ground rules that help with my facilitation in the class would also promote equality, diversity and social justice to my students.

It is very important to ensure that the students understand how participation and class will be managed with these set of ground rules. I would begin with explaining to the students about the course outline and assessments involved in the coming 14 weeks. It is necessary for me to simplify the ground rules when it involves deadlines and timeframe for submission, meetings or consultation. Students must learn how to respect time and tardiness is a classic sign of negligence. This is my number one priority when setting the ground rules, it transcends into the weekly class meeting or assignments deadline. Ideally, the

students will learn how to manage and respect others' time too. My second ground rule is, English language is the only language of communication in my class. Students have to be reminded that the only way for them to be a competent speaker is to converse more in the language itself.

Ideally, the best way to create ground rules is to involve the students and they would generate the entire list during the first meeting. If the students are having difficulty coming up with ground rules, or if they do not come up with a particular ground rule I feel is important, I would prompt them. If there is none, then I will add it to the list. First week meeting can be quite daunting for most students as they are not too familiar with me as well as my teaching style. I realised that some students prefer to be passive or shy away from contributing ideas; I would always explain that my class is no safe haven for passive students; everyone is exposed.

The listed ground rules would keep everyone on track with their roles, responsibilities as well as to instil respect towards each other. It is hoped that my students know that being a professional; I am not merely preaching about the ground rules. Action does speak louder than words.

Interactive

workshop

practice in Engineering



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In this 1-credit Workshop Practice course, students learn to recognise safety issues in the workshop and practise correct machine handling and usage. After the theory was over, the students entered the workshop. They obeyed instructions to wear proper attire, including the “no slipper or sandal” rule. I observed that the students could operate the machines but lacked confidence as they kept asking me whether they were right or wrong. So I stood far away and kept an eye on them, and found that they could do better.

I had recently revised the assessment for this course to take into consideration the limitation of time and machines. After getting input from other lecturers and technicians, the individual projects were converted into individual skills assessment, that is, the students were evaluated with a set of questions and skills demonstration. For example, they had to explain the process of welding and demonstrate how to do the welding process.

The group project was more challenging for the students. The students were asked to sketch a cabinet

and seek feedback from technicians and lecturers on whether the design could be executed with the tools and materials available in the workshop. However, the progress at the design stage was slow. Some had to revise their design after experiencing for themselves the difficulty of cutting the materials. They came to me with their suggestions on how to solve their problem and asked for my opinion.

I noticed that they had critical thinking and problem solving skills although they were first year students, and these skills are needed in the engineering field. They also showed their teamwork as the whole group of 12 would come and see me, instead of only the leader. On the last day of the workshop practice course, I could see the good quality of products they produced. Some lecturers had even reserved their products to use in their laboratory. The students were also smiling and enjoying the result of their hard work as they did gotong-royong to clean up the workshop.

Teaching in the moment



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This is one of the lessons in Basic First Aid, and the topic was reaching and moving victims. This lesson covered the theories, concepts and steps to take when considering to access or move an injured victim. Before coming into this class, I had read an online article about “teaching in the moment”. I decided to experiment with this notion because I was quite well versed with this topic. I laid down very few expectations coming into this class and decided to let the lesson take its own twist as it progressed. Constrained by meticulously planned lessons, I felt that I was unaware of my surroundings and students.

With this method, I was surprised that the lesson flowed rather smoothly with adequate levels of engagement from students. The students seemed a little more at ease. The difference was that I focused less on myself and my plans, and more on my students as I taught in the moment. Also with the free flowing session, I somehow managed to spontaneously come up with new ideas for teaching-learning activities that I had not thought of before when formally planning for a lesson.

With this experiment I believe that it would be beneficial to take a backseat once in a while to break free from formal planning and “teach in the moment”. To me, the heightened awareness of the environment and students’ response is key to getting some enlightenment on new ideologies and teaching methods.



Telling the students 'I don't know'



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On 21st March 2016 when I taught about blood product; a continuation from blood donation topic earlier, my students participated actively during the lecture and asked many questions. I could not answer some of the questions which were related to the topic but dealt with clinical settings which I have no experience of. I told the students that I needed to do further reading and will answer them later. From this experience, I learned that students will accept if we confess that we do not know the answer and will get back to them once we find the answer. I think it is better this way than giving wrong information to the students.

In a different class, Ethnic Relations, the topic was “Kepelbagaian Agama: Mencari Titik Pertemuan”. At the beginning of the lesson, I projected a picture of various symbols of religions in Malaysia. Students managed to identify a majority of the symbols and from this I knew that they have some prior knowledge about religions in Malaysia. Even though I am not the content expert of this course,

I found that not much explanation is needed because students already have prior knowledge about the topic as they have similar lecture on religions been taught another course (Tamadun Islam dan Tamadun Asia Tenggara).

But there was a particular problem as this topic is quite sensitive because it involves religions. I do not have enough knowledge to explain more about other religions (except my religion which is Islam). When discussing other religions, I let the students who embrace that particular religion to take part in explaining things that I am not sure at. I found that many students were willing to share and they participated actively in this sharing session with many interesting information. From this experience, I learned that it is good to provide some sharing session during lecture so that students can share their knowledge, thought and experience about the topic.

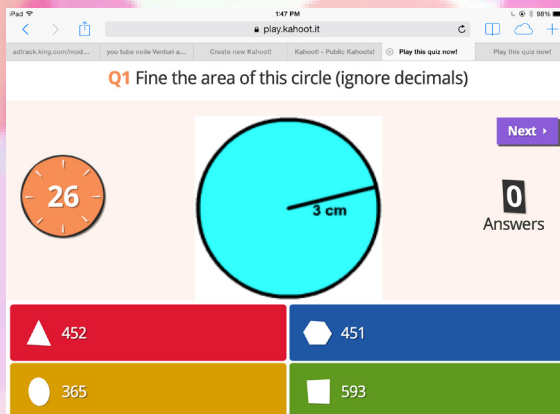
Think-Pair-Share for monitoring attendance



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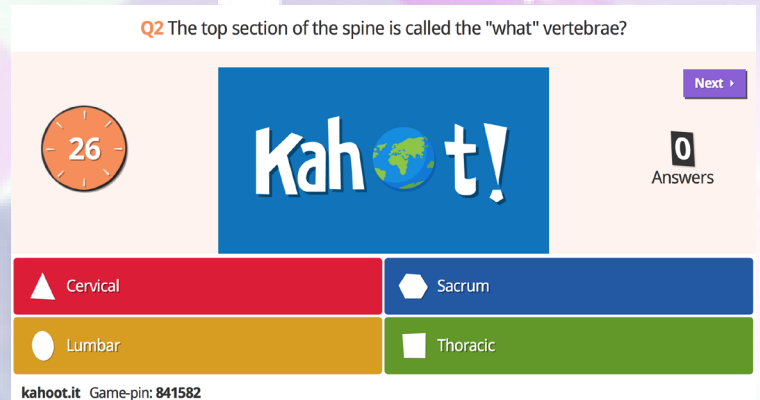
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Final scoreboard

zac	9233
Amelia	8150
Livi	7216
Abi	6184
lew lew	5866

[Download results](#) [Favourite ★](#) [Play again](#) [Play a different Kahoot!](#)



Who would have thought that Think-Pair-Share can be used to monitor attendance? It is like killing two birds with one stone. In TMX1022 class, I had 178 students. I could not possibly remember all their faces and names in order to track their attendance. The students might ask their friends to sign for them or they sign the attendance sheet and leave the class. One time, there was a student who signed the attendance and went off. He was caught because he was there at the beginning but when I called his name, he was not there anymore. When I asked him about it the following day, he said that he went to the toilet and did not come back.

Therefore, I implemented Think-Pair-Share in between each of the learning objectives. After I covered one learning objective, I would gave them a question on it and two minutes for them to pair with their friend and discuss the answer. Then I would call their name randomly and they had to share their answer in front of the class. This is very useful to catch students' attention because they are afraid they would be selected. This is also effective for me to find out which students are absent during class.

A mobile tool, Kahoot, turned out to be a way to get good attendance. I had used Kahoot a number of times. One day, the class representative told me that the attendance for my lecturer is always full whenever I use Kahoot because they look forward to it. I am happy to hear that not only students pay attention during class, they also enjoy the session as well.

Computer



What **fun** can students have in a lecture?

In the first class of *Animation Studio 1* course, the students gave me weird looks when I used animation jargon and terms. I asked them to write down what they knew about animation and their expectations of the class.

Some of them requested the class to be handled interestingly by me; some requested me to allow them to have food while they listen to my lecture.

I also feel that as the semester progressed, they become active and passionate about the learning unit – perhaps because they were getting to know their peers better.

I posted some links in the Morpheus so that my students would read the information on their own. Unfortunately, only a few of them opened the link. But I noticed that my students loved it when I said I will show them videos. So I showed them the video of History of Animation. The beauty of showing videos is that they can easily understand the timeline of animation history. Watching videos give the student some relaxing time while helping them to understand the topic better. So I attempted to use videos every week to engage them.



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“I also feel that as the semester progressed, they become active and passionate about the learning unit ”

Unpredictability of bedside teaching



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I am always on my toes in preparing myself for bedside teaching because I often have to make last minute changes to my preparation. There was a newly admitted case referred from Bintulu Hospital in the Paediatric Orthopaedic Ward during morning my ward rounds earlier. The patient was a 20-month old baby boy with underlying cyanotic congenital heart disease who presented with history of fever and swelling of the right thigh.

After I finished with the ward rounds, I informed students that they were given one hour to clerk and examine the child and then present the case to me for bedside teaching discussion of the day.

The nature of bedside teaching is unpredictable. Medical students need to learn to be well prepared for any circumstances, as medicine is always unpredictable. The session lasted for 90 minutes with a 20-minute presentation of the patient's background by a student and 70 minutes of physical examination practice, differential diagnosis discussion, investigations, treatment and impromptu quizzes. Students were encouraged to stop me at any time for question and answer session.

The session was very interactive session. All students took part in gathering information from the patient. This session involved problem-based learning in a real life ward setting. I took the opportunity to revise topics that have been covered in their other postings

(Paediatrics and Internal Medicine); cyanotic heart disease, rheumatic heart disease, infective endocarditis and subacute bacterial prophylaxis. Apart from that, I left them with some Orthopaedic learning needs.

Students had the chance to practise their skills in obtaining information, processing the information gathered from the patient into significant medical history, examining the patient to support the history, organizing their findings to find possible diagnosis and planning investigations and managing the patient in one hour (as in the long case examination during the final professional examination). We were very fortunate to be given the opportunity to practise a strict one-hour time rule as in the actual examination format. Throughout the session, I have asked them thought provoking questions in order to sharpen their critical thinking skills and expressing their opinions.

Peer observation of teaching

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I was teaching the last sub-topic for a learning unit and my faculty evaluator would observe and evaluate me as partial fulfilment to meet the requirements of the Teaching Practice module in the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning (CLM 5084).

Of course, I felt anxious and at the beginning, I looked unconfident. However, I told myself, “he is also a human being, and maybe he can make mistakes as well.” After that, I gained my confidence and continued the class in my own style.

I introduced the absolute value using real life situations (submarine, airplane and sea level), and it seemed to be effective for me to explain the concept of distance between a point and the origin.

At the end of the observation, the faculty evaluator gave me good feedback and told me that there is some room for improvement, which I think is true.

Between **spoon feeding** and **guided learning**



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‘Please try first and we will discuss together’. The usual sentence I said during my lecture session. Certain students cannot accept it. They do not like it because I do not provide solutions in my slides or in my explanations when I gave examples. I want them to think, to learn by discussing with their peers, or to work alone.

My intention is to teach them how to find information using internet and books, and to teach them how to build their confidence level by making a decision on the finalised solutions.

But this type of lecturers receive negative feedback from students. They comment that they do not understand what is taught. This kind of feedback hurts. Students compare the approaches used by different lecturers. The pre-university students’ favourite lecturer is one who spoon feeds.

I had one student who always compared my style with those of the other lecturers in the same subject. The student always said that she could not understand what I taught. I accepted it because I really know my intention. But one day, she came to me and said, ‘Madam, you are right. I am sorry. At degree level we need to learn to be independent. Thank you for the advice and you are my idol’.





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Copy and Paste without critical thinking

For the *Chemical Engineering Laboratory 1* course, before entering the laboratory, students were required to bring the hardcopy of the experiment manual that was uploaded to Morpheus. In two hours, they needed to start with pre-start procedure of the instrument, followed by the experiment, and lastly the shutdown procedure.

Although students had been given a complete experiment manual earlier, they seemed not to have the initiative to read and understand it before conducting the experiment. To support my hypothesis, I asked them basic questions related to the experiment such as ‘what is the theory for the experiment?’, ‘what are the three basic variables such as independent, dependant and constant?’, and ‘what is/are the experiment hypothesis(es)?’. Unfortunately, most of them could not answer these questions. I told them that to get good data and results, they should know the hypothesis and the underlying theory of the experiment. Only then they would be able to conduct the experiment in a proper way and can validate their raw data at the end of the experiment.

In the 10th week of the semester, students submitted their first log book. Most of the groups did not critically discuss the information that they included in a tutorial chart. Some of them copied and pasted the information from the laboratory manual. I had explained to them that if they obtained the methodology from text books, the Internet or laboratory manuals, they still needed to write a justification for each step in the procedure. The reason why I give this instruction is to ensure that all of my students understand the experiment very well. Students can either propose their own experiment set up or use any instrument available in the lab. To check their thinking on this, they are required to submit a log book for the methodology part the following week. By the end of the semester, it seemed that they could do well on the interpretation of the results, showing that they had developed some higher order thinking skills.

Diversity in students'

TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

I teach Information Technology to pre-university students, and most of my students use technology every day in the form of computers, smartphones and software. In the very first class, I would ask students to explain how these devices work and most of them did not have any idea.



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It is understandable that modern computers nowadays have grown into a very complex system. The dilemma that I observe from this situation is the lack of curiosity among my students. It is different from my generation where we would be amazed and have this great sense of wonder – and therefore always try to find explanations on how things work. Maybe the new generation is born in an era when these technologies are already prevalent and they just accept it as part of life. Students are comfortable at being the user and if anything out of the ordinary happens to their computer, they send it to the repair shop.

One particular challenge of teaching Information Technology is the wide spectrum of students' knowledge and skills in handling technology. At one end of the spectrum are students who live in the city and use computers and smartphones all the time. At the other end of the spectrum are students, usually from rural areas, who rarely encounter any technology in their life. There are also students who have taken Information Technology as a subject in secondary school and sat for the paper in the SPM exam but they

have not had much exposure to using computers!

The impact of this diversity is the difficulty to find a task that will be challenging enough to capture one group of students' interest and yet not too overwhelming for another group of students. As a solution, I try to find out my students' background and use group tasks relating to design which involve students from across the spectrum. This way, students can help one another regardless of their background.



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Handling students who would not ask questions in class

In the first tutorial class for Chemistry for a new batch of students, I gave guidelines on asking questions and giving feedback during tutorials. I wanted my students to feel comfortable in a tutorial setting since there were fewer students. I also wanted to set the environment as knowledge sharing rather than one-way teaching. I started by telling them what they should be able to achieve by the end of the class, and continued with examples of real life applications. Since most of the students were still shy, I let them try the One-Minute Paper to get feedback from them regarding the class and also me as the lecturer. One-Minute Paper involves giving students one minute to write down their answer to one question. For example, “what is one thing you still do not understand?” or “write down one question you would like to ask me.”

From the One-Minute Paper response, the students seemed happy about the class and asked for more exercises to be given. Only two students asked me to further explain the significant figures for numerical calculations.

In other classes, some students would show me their answer to confirm their steps in answering the questions while others were afraid to even attempt to answer questions I posed in class. Most of the students preferred to ask me questions after class as they might be afraid that their questions were not relevant. I also noticed that students were generally afraid to ask questions when they seemed lost in the explanation on a particular topic. So I selected certain students to write their answers so that I could give feedback and the class can understand the correct steps in answering the questions.

It is not easy to turn the tutorial class into a place to share knowledge instead of judging one's capabilities, but asking for written responses seem to work with students who are reluctant to speak up in class.



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Lowering the standard or raising the bar?

Post-production Animation is all studio and practice, with no lectures. In terms of learning hours, it is a 2 (studio) + 1 (theory) course. My dilemma of lowering the standard to accommodate weaker students or raising the bar to push students to achieve their greatest potential surfaced in Week 5 of the semester.

In Week 5, I decided to ask for a form of progress report from the students. In Week 4, they were told to produce a film title sequence based on their existing short films or just create a brand new sequence. I have to say I was very disappointed with the students' attitude and performance since most of them acted like they had not been given the assignment.

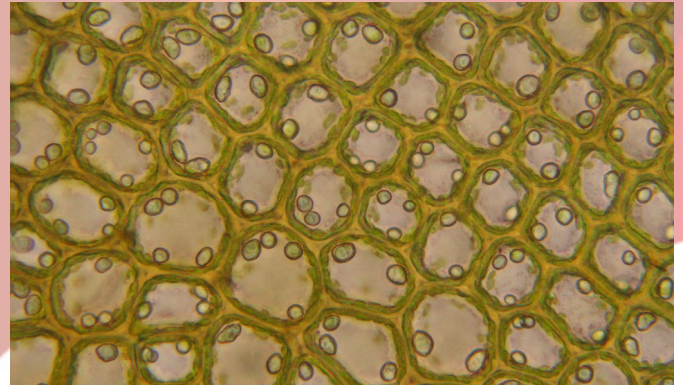
In a way I blamed myself for not being stern with them in terms of performance. I always believed in humanistic-based learning theory where the students are given the freedom to do or learn what they want. Apparently, it seems that most of them were too naïve to choose the right decision but there were a handful of students who surprised me with their wit and effort to nearly complete the assignment. In any case, I decided to be stricter with my teaching approach to prevent the students from taking advantage of my leniency.

Week 6 was the presentation week for the students to show their work on their first assignment that was given two weeks earlier. The gap between the best and the worst was so great that I am torn between lowering the standard to help the weak students and thus boring the ones who are doing very well or raising the bar to challenge the smart ones but failing the weaker students as a result. I decided to just follow the learning objectives and outcomes. Thus, if the smart students were bored with the syllabus, there is nothing much I could do but to deliver the actual teaching content.

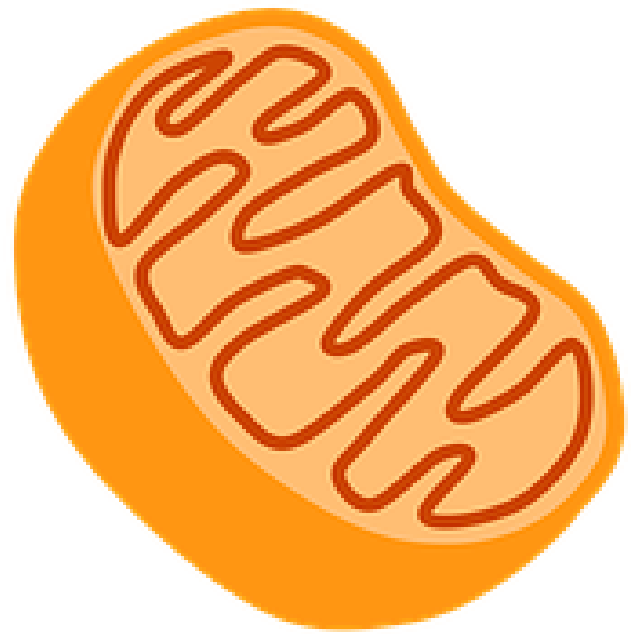
I brought two other colleagues from other faculties to observe the students' work. I was surprised when they complimented the students' work and they were impressed with the students while I, on the other hand was less impressed with overall performance. I believed that the students were lacking in creativity – the core of art! Instead of resolving my dilemma, I resolved to teach them the basics of creativity in the next class!



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Making the abstract concepts concrete enough for students to understand



In teaching pre-university students on Cell Structure and Function in the course, *Biology I*, I encountered the problem of having to make abstract concepts concrete enough for students to understand them.

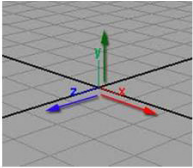
I believe that conducting a class which involve topics on structures (especially those which we could not imagine or see with naked eyes), cycles as well as processes, somehow certain approaches or skills are required in order to efficiently deliver the knowledge. Some lecturers have the abilities to explain things like this and describe with only verbal explanations. I believed this is somehow depends on their natural abilities in converting something complex into a simpler version in order to assist the students.

However, for me, I have not yet reached that level, and thus I employ both traditional (verbal explanation) and modern (diagrams and video presentation) methods to accomplish the learning objectives.

In this topic, cellular components are quite a task to be discussed because these structures cannot be seen with naked eyes. Therefore with the use of coloured diagrams with labels, each structure could be identified and remembered easily. I could observe students' engagement too with the use of these diagrams. They understood better and were able to distinguish them, as observed during the reflection session. As for processes, with the aid of videos, verbal explanations could be further understood. The utilisation of video was efficient as it illustrated motion and structures. Thus, I found that audio-visual aids helped to compensate for my present lack of ability to explain abstract concepts using words alone.

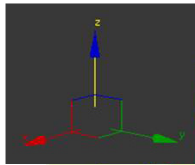


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World coordinate
system in Maya

World coordinate
system in 3D Max



Students not trying to do their best

I had asked students to hand in a draft proposal for the *Advanced Animation Studio 1* class. Many of them did not have references, although they were told to include them. They made up excuses for omitting the references. But there were a few who asked for my advice to improve their proposals and storyboards.

Quite a number of students were late. As a result, they missed an important part of the lecture where bridging of background knowledge and setting the direction of the lecture were done. Some confessed that they missed the bus because they overslept. When asked why they were absent the previous week, they claimed that they were still at their hometown and faced air transport problems.

Later on in the semester, we had a presentation of student proposals for their architectural visualisation.

One group presented terrible sketches, evident of last minute work. I showed my disappointment and told them the importance of pre-production, and how important it is to develop a good proposal, produce quality sketches, storyboard and research for ideation.

To urge some commitment from the students, I asked them to resubmit their work in Morpheus and to document the whole production process in the blogs for assessment and progress check. When I moved on to 3D modelling by using Autodesk Maya®, it was not any easier to the students due to their lack of practice in using the software.

I hope that my students understand the principle that “Practice makes perfect”; even I had to spend my weekends to practise until late at night every time before classes.

Dealing with dry subject matter in creative arts



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The screen shot and poster from the film shown (right) in my Pengarahan Filem course.



Teori Pengarahan Filem merupakan topik yang “dry” kerana topik berkaitan dengan konsep teoritikal dalam pengarah filem. Setiap pengarah seharusnya mempunyai prinsip teoritikal yang digunakan dalam penghasilan filem.

Sebagai contoh, teori auteur berkaitan dengan kreativiti individu pengarah tersebut secara visual. Dengan penekanan terhadap prinsip teoritikal dalam pengarah filem dalam menentukan kaedah bagi menghasilkan stail dan juga teknik pengarah filem yang akan dihasilkan.

Dalam kuliah, saya berkongsi beberapa teori pengarah dan memberi contoh pengarah-pengarah yang mengaplikasikan kaedah teoritikal tersebut dalam pengarah filem mereka.

Kemudian, video contoh filem dari pengarah yang dimaksudkan ditayangkan agar pelajar-pelajar

mendapat gambaran mengenai kaedah, stail dan teknik yang dimaksudkan. Dengan menyelit video ini juga dapat mengalihkan tumpuan pelajar yang sudah mula bosan dengan penyampaian secara lisan sahaja.

Selain dari itu juga, slaid pembentangan yang digunakan adalah berbeza. Kebiasaannya saya hanya menggunakan Microsoft Powerpoint tetapi untuk topik ini, saya mengaplikasikan pembentangan menggunakan perisian Prezi yang lebih berbentuk interaktif agar pelajar lebih tertarik dan memberi fokus sepanjang sesi pengajaran.

Aplikasi teknik pengajaran ini dilihat berkesan kerana kebanyakan pelajar dapat memberi fokus walaupun terdapat sebilangan kecil pelajar sahaja yang mula bosan dan tidak memberi perhatian terhadap sesi pembelajaran.

The issue of **which language to use** for lectures



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“Saya bimbang jika menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris sepenuhnya, kelas akan menjadi senyap dan maklumbalas akan menjadi kurang.”

Sebelum ini, kelas-kelas yang saya kendalikan menggunakan kedua-dua Bahasa iaitu Bahasa Kebangsaan dan Bahasa Inggeris dalam penyampaian. Perlu dijelaskan di sini, semasa saya baru mengajar di UNIMAS, saya memang menyampaikan kuliah dalam Bahasa Inggeris kerana sudah terbiasa dengan pengajaran dan pembelajaran di UiTM.

Tetapi, saya dapati terdapat pelajar yang tidak memahami kandungan pembelajaran jika dilaksanakan 100 peratus dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

Maka bermula dari itu saya menggunakan dwibahasa. Bagi saya, pemahaman kandungan pembelajaran lebih perlu ditekankan berbanding masalah bahasa. Walaubagaimanapun, saya dapati, penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris saya terutamanya dalam perbualan semakin

berkarat. Saya mengakui kelemahan itu dan perlu memperbaikinya.

Untuk kelas Fotografi Seni Halus ini, saya masih menggunakan dwibahasa kerana ini adalah kelas perbincangan. Saya bimbang jika menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris sepenuhnya, kelas akan menjadi senyap dan maklumbalas akan menjadi kurang.

Maka dalam mengendalikan kelas ini, saya kekal dengan dwibahasa manakala kelas-kelas teknikal, saya mula menggunakan 80 peratus Bahasa Inggeris dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran.

Using YouTube in lectures



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“I could see that students were thrilled and excited to see the animals and plants featured in the movie clip.”

The learning unit on Species Diversity in the *Biodiversity* course represents the most important portion of the course. The class can be very tiring with a lot of information. So, to make the class more interesting I started off the second lecture of the semester by playing a video on the importance of biodiversity to capture their attention. I felt this provided the basis in an interactive way for the student to know the importance of the course that they were going to take for the semester.

I could see that students were thrilled and excited to see the animals and plants featured in the movie clip. I had a good feeling that this group would be a great cohort. They also asked a lot of questions just after the movie like if they could go outdoors to observe biodiversity.

In the subsequent learning unit on Genetic Diversity, to grab student's attention, I started off the class with a movie. Then we took about 10 minutes to discuss the importance of genetics and why that field is relevant to biodiversity. This is the hardest part of the course because it involves some level of genetic understanding and calculations. For this, we did some workout on the whiteboard and the students were given the opportunity to solve the problems in front of the class.

In this class, besides recalling what we have learned, I started off by providing clear learning objectives on what would be learned in class for that day. I feel this is very efficient because towards the end of the class I could ensure that I covered all the learning objectives by inferring from students' answers to my questions. But I could not have succeeded without the use of movie clips.



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28 June 2016



Briefing on PGDip in Teaching & Learning for Cohort 14, Session 2016/2017
29 June 2016



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18-26 July 2016



Workshop on Enriching Your Blended Learning Course
1-15 August 2016



Workshop on Towards Blended Learning
1-18 August 2016



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1-10 August 2016



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26 August 2016



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